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#fieldmemoirs #Historical_Journalism

Skolkovo was indeed yet another Kremlin Potemkin village, meant to show Russia was, as one headline put it, "Not Just Oil and Oligarchs," though oil and oligarchs paid for this "Russian Silicon Valley": https://lnkd.in/eTuT4SJs. Critics at home and abroad mocked it. But the pet project of Dmitry Medvedev's brief thaw drew cautious optimism. Chrystia Freeland's feature in The Atlantic, "The Next Russian Revolution," read: "Ample reasons for pessimism aside, the Skolkovo project is not without theoretical basis."

What I met in this fake place was an unlikely political drama that satisfied the French classicists' theory of theatre. On September 20, 2009, three figures associated with reforms appeared in a single place within a single day: Russia's market reform architect Yegor Gaidar, the founding father of modern Singapore Lee Kuan Yew, and Medvedev, whose rhetoric initially instilled reform hopes.

Over 15 years back, in early October 1993, in a brief trip to the capital from a Pacific province, I saw the Russian "White House" still sooty from tank shelling - no electricity, windows shattered - all traces of the bloody constitutional crisis that ended the standoff between Boris Yeltsin's reformers - Gaidar and his team - and pro-Communist hardliners.

I happened to walk down a gloomy corridor on Staraya Square past a door with a sheet of paper printed on a dot-matrix printer and pinned: "I.O. (Acting) Chairman of the Government Gaidar." Very modest.

The use of force dramatically weakened Yeltsin's popularity; what followed, however, were Russia's first (and in fact the last) direct national parliamentary elections. Back in Moscow after the vote, I sat on a plane with a newly elected MP from the Yabloko party, who offered me a ride to the city centre. I tried to reciprocate by offering a tin of caviar to the man I mistook for a driver: Yabloko cofounder Mikhail Zadornov, a future finance minister and banker on the Forbes list. He declined politely.

I only saw Gaidar up close once, at Skolkovo: frail, slow-walking. (He would die three months later, at 53.) Then I was at the photo op: Medvedev and Lee.

It is striking how different the paths were despite those Aristotelian unities.

Authoritarian pragmatic Lee, who remained influential until his death at 91. Gaidar, who accepted political death for his reform long before the natural one. And - Medvedev.

I was covering what turned out to be the final days of Medvedev-Putin tandemocracy before the September 2011 rokirovka. His team did expect a 2nd term. He had some legitimacy, time, Western and technocratic support, and could interrupt Russia's trajectory. But didn't dare to act: he lacked both courage and imagination. He chose to turn into a parody of himself.

As a Reuters chronicler, I got in the “Medvedev window” literally: see me in Skolkovo, half-face, on the Forbes page.

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Views are my own, do not represent the Government of Canada

МЕМОРИАЛЬНАЯ
1993
ТЕРРИТОРИЯ

Начало экономической реформы

Реформы начались с либерализации цен в январе 1992, что привело к наполнению внутреннего рынка продовольственными и промышленными товарами. Однако за год цены выросли в десятки раз. Большинство населения получала мизерные зарплаты и пенсии, а денежные накопления обесценились. Разрушались оставшиеся без государственного финансирования системы бесплатной медицины, образования и науки. Россия столкнулась с безработицей. Всё это вело к массовому обнищанию населения.

"ШОКОВАЯ ТЕРАПИЯ"

ПРАВОЕ

19 марта 2021, 13:11 Фото

Главный реформатор 90-х: 65 лет со дня рождения Егора Гайдара

Егор Гайдар и Дмитрий Медведев на открытии бизнес-школы «Сколково», 2009 год 15/15

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Roman Abramovich

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Real estate: markets, luxury homes, and cities.

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Roman Abramovich, Dmitry Medvedev

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In this file photo taken Sunday, Sept. 20, 2009, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, right, speaks with Roman Abramovich, who holds on to second place list of Ru... [+]